

School Improvement Fund State Application

Section 1003(g) Fiscal Year 2007

**Activities Reviewed by the
Title I Committee of Practitioners**

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School Improvement Fund (SIF) State Application -

Specific Application Contents

Part A – Funds Retained by the SEA

- 1. Identify the amount of funds the SEA will retain from Section 1003 (g) and (a) for State- level activities:**
 - **Section 1003 (g):** 5% of \$1,804,240 = \$90,212
 - **Section 1003 (a):** 5% of the 4% reservation = \$376,068
- 2. Describe the SEA’s current Statewide System of Support required under Section 1117 and how the SEA will use funds available to the SEA under Section 1003(g) and 1003(a) to build capacity at the LEA and school levels to improve student achievement.**

Maryland State Department of Education is in the process of building a structure for the coordination, brokerage, and delivery of services and support that are provided to districts and schools across the State. The process for building this framework involves close examination of the types and levels of support that are currently provided to districts and schools as well as identifying additional supports that are required in order to meet the State’s performance standards as well as those of No Child Left Behind.

A brief description of *The Breakthrough Center* is outlined below. To date, the Department is in the process of finalizing the concept and is working with the Education Alliance at Brown University to identify educational experts from other State agencies and those serving in policy and research roles to provide critical feedback on the concept and assist the Department in finalizing conceptual and operational details. Once that work is complete in the early part of 2008, representatives from Maryland school districts together with State officials will further refine the concept and begin to assemble logistical frameworks and procedures. The Breakthrough Center is scheduled for piloting at the start of the 2008-2009 school year. However, the implementation of The Breakthrough Center does not preclude existing services and supports, also outlined below, from being delivered to districts and schools.

The Breakthrough Center Overview

The Breakthrough Center provides a framework for intervention in underperforming districts and schools that is coordinated across the Maryland State Department of Education Divisions, deploys resources consistent with need, has direct impact on student and school performance, and establishes measures for effectiveness.

Highlights of New initiatives that The Breakthrough Center will facilitate include:

- Establishment of dedicated space and organizational structures for the coordination and brokerage of MSDE, district-to-district, and external agency services delivered to districts and schools in improvement as well as those seeking continuous improvement.
- Introduces innovative methods for leveraging resources—human, fiscal, material, technological—in order to improve teaching, leadership, and learning. For example, the institution and coordination of a service that places highly effective teachers, principals, and other instructional staff in rotational assignments or laboratory settings in districts and schools throughout the State in order to expose their practice and inspire and teach others how to follow suit. The Center would also coordinate their replacement with other highly effective staff.
- Capitalize on existing and potential partnership opportunities with private, and government industries to develop content, maximize technology, and access talented human capital for use in schools and in classrooms.
- Coordinate the connection between districts for accessing breakthrough practices, programs, people, and instruction that are getting results.
- Grant incentives to districts for participation and/or contributions to the Breakthrough Center, for example, quid-pro-quo arrangements for center involvement or revenue-generating opportunities for service or program contributions.
- Deliver or coordinate focused statewide programs and support in areas that every district faces challenges, for example, accelerating the performance of students receiving special services and High School Assessment preparation.
- Provides advisement on the strategic placement and timing of programs and people in districts to address identified challenges and replicate successful efforts.

Underperforming districts and schools, as measured by the State’s accountability system, would be required to participate in the most intensive services of the Breakthrough Center, referred to as Buildup Services. Buildup Services include services considered “core” to district and school health: Data Analysis; Curriculum and Assessment alignment; Professional Development; and Student, Family, and Community Involvement. In each of these core areas, focus is paid to the establishment of structures to facilitate successful operation and sustainability and people development to ensure successful implementation and improvement. Participation in Buildup Services is differentiated based on a collaborative and comprehensive needs analysis between district staff and MSDE staff informed through the triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data collection and review processes, many of which are currently in place. **MSDE proposes to use the 5 percent set aside to support Buildup Service delivery to LEAs and schools requiring such services.**

Access Services would be made available on a voluntary basis to every district throughout the State seeking continuous improvement, providing opportunities for enrichment, access to document repository services, government and business partnership opportunities, and components of Buildup Services as capacity permits.

Although the Breakthrough Center is not formally in place, the following services and technical assistance opportunities **are currently being offered** to schools and school systems throughout the State. The Maryland State Department of Education’s current Statewide System of School Support reinforces Maryland’s commitment to identify, define, establish and implement technical assistance in reading and mathematics with strategic instructional support for

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subgroups in need within Local Education Agencies (LEAs) and schools. Many of these services will continue to be offered through the Breakthrough Center once it is fully implemented.

Services Currently in Place

Master Plan:

The Maryland State Department of Education monitors school systems through their annual Master Plan Updates. The Bridge to Excellence Act requires that each local school system reassess and revise its Master Plan as necessary and submit an Annual Update to the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) for review. The Master Plan Update summarizes progress that the school system is making in accelerating student performance and eliminating achievement gaps. The school system's successes and challenges for all students and subgroups of students, priorities for the coming year along with a description of how fiscal resources are being distributed to support the priorities are included in each annual Master Plan Update. The Master Plan Update also contains changes in demographics and the fiscal climate, along with a discussion of the effect of these changes on the school system and the Master Plan implementation.

Title I, Part A:

The Maryland State Department provides hands-on training to Title I Coordinators through one-on-one appointments, technical assistance meetings, and administrative briefings and meetings. Each program is reviewed annually and technical assistance provided through feedback and monitoring. Support is given schools and districts who offer School Choice and Supplemental Educational Services in the form of training and technical assistance. Supplemental Educational Service Providers are monitored annually with written feedback provided to both the local school system and provider.

State School Improvement Grants

The Maryland State Department of Education awards State School Improvement Grants to school districts with schools in any level of improvement. Funding may only be used to support school improvement activities that align with LEA Master Plans and with school specific improvement plans. As part of the application process, each LEA is required to describe how grant dollars will be used to support school improvement activities in the following academic focus areas, as appropriate: reading, math, English, algebra/data analysis, biology, and government. Consideration will be given to proposed expenditures in the following areas: parent involvement, school climate, attendance, and high school graduation, but only if the activity directly supports one of the academic focus areas.

Schools in Year 1 and Year 2 School Improvement:

Professional Development in Reading and Math Content:

The Maryland State Department of Education provides the backbone of essential professional development on reading and mathematics content and instruction. Specific memorandum of understanding to delineate and articulate the responsibilities of MSDE, each LEA, and each school in improvement establishes the commitment for school improvement that is necessary to move from professional development to improved student achievement. MSDE team members conduct on-site school visits to coach leadership and faculty as part of school profile completion. The team provides oral and written feedback to the LEA and school leadership.

Support for Special Education:

The State provides grants to schools identified for improvement due to sub-performance of the special education subgroup. The grants are competitive and accompanied by technical support from MSDE personnel, who provide professional development, conduct observations and share best practices.

Schools in Corrective Action:

MSDE has developed a comprehensive process for technical assistance to those schools in corrective action. Annually, MSDE provides an annual meeting at the school or central location to introduce the School Profile Process to schools in Corrective Action, including the School Data Profile, Teacher Needs Capacity Assessment (TCNA), and the Leadership Interviews. Materials are distributed to schools so they are available to assist schools as they develop their comprehensive needs assessments.

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Teacher Capacity Needs Assessment:

The Teacher Capacity Needs Assessment was first developed by the Maryland State Department of Education's (MSDE) I-PAS/Challenge Initiative during the 2004-2005 school year. Based on Drs. Ronald Thomas and Mike Hickey of Towson University's earlier research and experience with school improvement and data-based decision making, the Assessment is divided into six themes. These six themes are related to the Voluntary State Curriculum and the Maryland School and High School Assessments. The TCNA leads a school through a self-diagnosis of the degree of implementation of a variety of school improvement activities and an analysis of the root causes surrounding teachers' capacity to teach to Maryland standards/expectations and assess student learning.

Schools in Restructuring:

Restructuring Implementation Technical Assistance:

The Restructuring Implementation Technical Assistance (RITA) Initiative was developed in January 2007 by the Program Improvement and Family Support (PIFS) Branch in the Division of Student, Family, and School Support (DOSFSS). This initiative is part of MSDE's Statewide System of Support for schools in improvement. Specifically, the RITA Initiative targets those schools that have been in Restructuring Implementation status of school improvement for three or more years. The RITA process is designed to assist Restructuring Implementation schools in identifying programs and systems that are effective in advancing student achievement and programs and systems that need to be improved or eliminated in order to ensure delivery of an effective education for students in the Maryland Public School System.

City Data Project:

The Maryland State Department of Education implemented the City Data Project with eight Baltimore City Schools in their first year of restructuring implementation in 2006. These schools work closely with State teams to identify data to be analyzed in order to improve their capacity to strengthen instructional programs for increased student achievement.

Principal's Academy:

The Maryland State Department of Education provides a year-long professional development program for principals working in restructuring schools. The academy emphasizes principals' capacity to perform classroom observations effectively and link instruction and evaluation to student performance.

Principal Fellows Program:

Principal Fellows must agree to serve for three years in a school that is in restructuring. They are paid an annual stipend in addition to their current salary. The program is designed to ensure there is high quality leadership in low-performing schools.

Annual Stipends:

The Maryland State Department of Education provides a \$2000 stipend to teachers who hold advanced professional certificates and work in corrective action or restructuring schools. The stipend encourages highly qualified teachers to remain in high need schools.

3. From the list of strategies on page 3, describe the school improvement strategy or strategies the SEA will implement with section 1003(g) and 1003(a) funds, including a brief explanation of why each strategy was selected.

The Maryland State Department of Education will require LEAs and schools to use 1003(g) grant funds and 1003 (a) grant funds to implement the strategies below. In a memorandum of understanding between The Breakthrough Center and MSDE, a proportion of funds that an LEA receives will be used by the local school district for provision of materials, technology and salaries for services rendered to the local school system by The Breakthrough Center. By accessing services through Maryland's Breakthrough Center, schools and school systems will be confident that the strategies identified in this proposal will be implemented.

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A. Customized technical assistance/professional development to build LEA and school staff capacity.

- ✓ Through a strategic and collaborative approach, The Breakthrough Center will work with districts to assess structural and instructional health through comprehensive data analysis, to identify the systemic weaknesses that are the gateway to other weaknesses, and then provide customized technical assistance and professional development to address identified needs.

B. Research-based strategies or practices to change instructional practice.

- ✓ Strategies utilized by The Breakthrough Center and participating districts which are fiscally supported by 1003(g) grant funds and 1003 (a) grant funds will be research-based and proven effective to change instructional practice.

C. Partnerships for the purpose of delivering technical assistance, professional development, and management advice.

- ✓ In partnership, districts and the Breakthrough Center will prioritize and strategize a phase-in covering three approaches: one for tackling the easy to fix weaknesses; a second that will address the harder to fix weaknesses that will require time, planning, and persistence; and a third to expand or replicate the success that is in place. 1003(g) grant funds and 1003 (a) grant funds will be used to support time for data collection, analysis and strategic planning for system school improvement.

D. School support teams who are part of the “statewide system of support” will receive professional development.

- ✓ 1003(g) grant funds and 1003 (a) grant funds will be utilized by school districts to access a greater diversity of experts, including master teachers from across the state, exceptional retired educators, leadership coaches, content and curriculum developers, technology advisors, etc, to provide professional development, coaching and support to overall school improvement efforts. These expert consultants will be utilized as members of school support teams within the statewide system of school support.

E. Implement other strategies determined by the SEA or LEA, as appropriate, for which data indicate the strategy is likely to result in improved teaching and learning in schools identified for improvement, corrective action, or restructuring.

- ✓ Finally, 1003(g) grant funds and 1003 (a) grant funds may be utilized by the LEA and schools to implement other strategies determined by the LEA and SEA, as appropriate, for which data indicate the strategy is likely to result in improved teaching and learning in schools identified for improvement, corrective action, or restructuring. Examples of allowable activities include: providing assistance to identify and address problems implementing parental involvement and professional development requirements described in No Child Left Behind (NCLB) sections 1118 and 1119; providing assistance in analyzing and revising

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the school's budget so the school's resources are more effectively allocated to the activities most likely to increase student academic achievement and remove the school from school improvement status; increasing highly qualified staff for the purpose of reducing class size or expanding intervention services to students; purchasing equipment and technology to support the integration of technology into the curriculum or proposed interventions, purchase materials that support instruction and research-based programs; and support professional growth with high-quality professional development that meets the Maryland Professional Development Standards.

Part B – Funds Awarded to LEAs

Each SEA must describe:

1. **How the SEA will allocate at least 95% of its section 1003(g) and 1003(a) funds, either separately or combined, to LEAs. In its description, the SEA must address the following statutory provisions:**
 - The criteria the SEA will use to give priority to LEAs with the lowest achieving schools that demonstrate - -
 - ✓ The greatest need for these funds and
 - ✓ The strongest commitment to ensuring that the funds are used to provide adequate resources for the lowest-achieving schools to meet the goals for improvement under section 1116.
 - How the SEA will define “greatest need” and “strongest commitment.” The Maryland methodology used to allocate at least 95% of section 1003(a) funds has been to award school systems with between 1 and 7 schools in school improvement \$100,000 per school. This amount is subtracted from the total allocation first. The remaining funds are divided among the schools in school systems with greater than 7 schools in school improvement at a rate of approximately \$74,943 per school in improvement. The 1003(g) funds will be awarded depending on the number of schools meeting the State's criteria identifying LEAs with schools in the greatest need and showing the strongest commitment to use these funds effectively.
 - Using 1003(g) funds, Maryland will give priority to LEAs with the lowest-achieving schools demonstrating the greatest need if they meet one or more of the following criteria:
 - ✓ Restructuring Implementation schools that have been in this status since before NCLB, (1995 and 1996 to present);
 - ✓ Restructuring Implementation schools' FARMS percentage must be above 63%;
 - ✓ Those eligible LEAs with the largest number of schools in restructuring implementation;

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LEAs that accept the 1003(g) grant funds must agree to use their grant allocation to pay for the **mandatory** services of RITA Teams to identify school and systemic weaknesses that have caused the school to be identified for the latter stage of school improvement [restructuring implementation] for over ten years. The allocation will then be used by the local school district for provision of materials, technology and salaries for services rendered to the local school system by The Breakthrough Center. The Breakthrough Center will provide customized technical assistance and professional development to address identified needs.

- LEAs with the lowest-achieving schools in restructuring implementation status since 1995 and 1996 to present must submit an approvable application providing the following information:
 - ✓ Executive Summary
 - ✓ Needs Assessment [providing three year trend data in reading and mathematics using MSA and milestone data for the school (s) receiving these grant funds]
 - ✓ Key Personnel [provide the names of persons responsible for scheduling the RITA Team visits and meeting with staff to communicate the team's feedback.]
 - ✓ Budget Narrative
 - ✓ Proposed Budget Page-Maryland Form (C-1-25)
 - ✓ General Education Provisions Act (GEPA Statement)
 - ✓ Maryland Assurance Form
- LEAs with schools in restructuring implementation since 1995 and 1996 to present will be deemed as having the **strongest commitment** to ensuring that the funds are used to provide adequate resources for the lowest-achieving schools to meet the goals for improvement under section 1116 if:
 - ✓ The LEA agrees to providing space and sufficient time for the RITA Team visits;
 - ✓ The LEA agrees to respond in writing to the RITA Teams' feedback concerning how the LEA will address the school and systemic findings made by the team;
 - ✓ The LEA agrees to implement the Breakthrough Center to provide customized technical assistance and professional development to meet the identified needs.
- **With respect to section 1003(g) funds (if allocated separately from 1003(a) funds), the criteria the SEA will use to determine grant award amounts to LEAs to ensure that each grant—**
 - ✓ Is of sufficient size and scope to support the activities required under sections 1116 and 1117, and
 - ✓ Is not less than \$50,000 or more than \$500,000 for each participating school.
- **The SEA will determine grant award amounts to LEAs in sufficient size and scope to support activities required under sections 1116 and 1117:**

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- ✓ After receiving and approving applications from the LEA, the cost of RITA Teams to complete a two-day school visit, meet as a team for discussion and consensus, and writing feedback;
- ✓ Awards will be allocated in increments of no less than \$50,000 and no more than \$100,000 per school in improvement depending on the number of approvable applications. MSDE has placed a cap on the amount each school will receive based on past spending records of each school district involved. Schools in the two highest need districts, Baltimore City and Prince George's County already receive school improvement funds from the 1003(a) grant and the State School Improvement grant. These school systems have a history of returning unencumbered funds to the State. Due to the lateness of this grant award, MSDE feels that a cap of \$100,000 per school will be more than adequate to implement the RITA initiative and one other school improvement strategy from the approved list.

- **How funds will be integrated with other funds awarded by the SEA under the ESEA.**

In view of the fact that the 1003(a) grant applications have already been approved and funds have been awarded to LEAs in Maryland, the 1003(g) funds *may* be integrated with the 1003(a) funds at the LEAs discretion. All uses of these funds will be with the approval of the State. Every school identified by the school system will already be receiving Title I, Part A funds which must show a reservation of 10% for professional development. In addition, the two priority school systems must also reserve 10% of their allocations for professional development as they are both school systems in improvement. Both school systems have system level professional development activities in place to improve teaching and learning in low performing schools. Both school systems receive 1003(a) funds. Prince George's County receives \$1,798,624 and Baltimore City receives \$4,346,674. These funds are currently being used to fund school improvement activities that fit under **Strategy E** above. Finally, all of the schools that receive 1003(g) grants also receive State School Improvement Grants. Both school systems receive 1003(a) funds. Prince George's County receives \$4,487,936 and Baltimore City receives \$3,273,925. These funds are also used to enhance professional development and for activities described under **Strategy E** above.

- **Whether, assuming section 1003(g) funds are appropriated in subsequent years, the SEA will renew an LEA's grant for up to two additional one-year periods if schools in the LEA are meeting the goals for improvement under section 1116.**

Maryland will make every effort to renew these grants for two additional one-year periods if USED does not appropriate 1003(g) in subsequent years if the schools meet the goals for improvement. This is dependent on the State budget.

2. **The local application provisions the SEA will require its LEAs to address the following to ensure that—**

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- a. **LEAs will use funds under section 1003(g) and 1003(a) to implement one or more of the school improvement strategies previously listed and that decisions about the strategy or strategies selected are based on data; and**

Maryland will include this statement in the application along with the strategy/strategies the State has selected. The LEAs must provide appropriate data to address the strategy in order for the application to be approved

- b. **The school improvement strategies supported with these funds contribute to achieving the annual measurable objectives in school improvement plans [§1116(b)(3)(v)], or to achieving the goals necessary for schools to exit corrective action and restructuring status, as appropriate.**

Maryland's **required End-of-Year Report** from the LEAs must address how the school improvement strategies supported with these funds contributed to achieving the annual measurable objectives in school improvement plans [§1116(b)(3)(v)], or to achieving the goals necessary for schools to exit corrective action and restructuring status, as appropriate.

3. **How the SEA will assess the effectiveness of school improvement activities and disseminate information on what works to other LEAs in the State.**

Maryland will review the **End-of-Year Reports** and analyze the **State Assessment results** from the current year being supported by the grant funds to ascertain if annual measurable objectives were met by the participating schools and/or if the schools exited improvement. **Dissemination of information on what works will occur during Title I Administrative Meetings (held at least two times annually) and Title I Briefings (held at least once annually). It has been a regular practice for MSDE to showcase strategies that work at each administrative meeting or briefing. Schools and school systems regularly present to their peers and offer suggestions and examples of what is working well in their Title I programs. MSDE is also in the process of revitalizing the Title I webpage. It is MSDE's intent to publish best practices on this website in the future.**

Part C – Monitoring

Each SEA must describe how it will monitor the effectiveness of the strategies selected and implemented with funds from section 1003(g) and 1003(a) and the steps the SEA will take if the school improvement strategies supported with these funds are not contributing to increased student achievement.

- Maryland will monitor the participating LEAs at least once during the grant period for 1003(a) and 1003(g). During this monitoring visit, the LEA will present documentation of the progress being made to address the findings made by the RITA Team.
- This documentation may be county benchmark data, reading/language arts and mathematics unit test data, or other evidence that will document effectiveness.
- Maryland *may* retrieve remaining funds if there is no attempt made to address the RITA Team findings for the school and/or district.